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To the Presiding Judge,

I am writing this reference for John Steele because I believe that he is a changed person who truly regrets his past. I work in the banking industry as a Director in private banking. By nature of the work I do I am cautious in my dealings and I don't trust people easily. John however, is someone who has earned both my trust and respect after observing him these past three years. John has become one of my close friends and I often turn to him to discuss problems and seek advice. When I was getting to know John he was always very honest and forthright with me about his past and the choices that he made years ago. I have seen his courage in humbling himself and admitting that he has made mistakes and bad choices. He has spoken about the consequences of his past actions. At the same time, rather than letting this define him, he has chosen to work hard to learn a new approach to life and to commit to finding a better path forward. I have watched as John has begun therapy, been introduced to living a philosophic life, discovered meditation and even started attending a Buddhist temple.

One of the ways that I got to know John was in participating in long endurance events with him. The events are team based, run over several days and can be challenging and very stressful. They are run by a company called GORUCK that was founded by a Green Beret. John is one of the best people you could have on your team. He is respectful of others, encourages everyone on the team to participate to the best of their ability, helps those who are struggling and often takes on more than his share of the work to help the team. Leadership of these events is complicated, not merely being the alpha male, but rather being empathetic and motivating the team. John has proven himself to be a great team lead and teacher.

Last year at a reunion event that John attended, one of the participants who was asked to be a speaker at the event decided to make John the target of her jokes and to shame him publicly for his past, she made crude jokes about his future in prison. I was so angry and appalled at what she was doing and I remember feeling nervous that this situation would escalate and that John would retaliate. John was calm and composed through the whole ordeal, he didn't get angry or try to defend himself. He calmly accepted the situation, and I could tell by his response that he took no offense. In front of many people, she approached him expecting, or perhaps hoping for, a response. Instead, John said he did not feel hurt, and still considered her a friend. The conversation ended with a hug and a pleasant goodbye, not at all what the gathering expected. A lot of people that day got to see the John I know.

I do not think John would have handled things this way in the past and it has been amazing watching a grown man change the way he is deep down. Despite his own more serious problems, John freely gives of himself and strives to be of service to those around him. I have seen this firsthand when I recently had some personal and health related struggles in my life.

This is my first letter to a federal judge and I take this immense responsibility seriously. I would not have written a letter on behalf of someone I know unless I felt completely sure of my opinion and only after serious thought. I truly believe that John has much to contribute and I hope others have the opportunity to see the person he is today.

Regards,



Teresa Garnett